United Nations E/CN.3/2007/3

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 December 2006

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Thirty-eighth session
27 February-2 March 2007
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Items for discussion and decision

Population and housing censuses

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Statistical Commission in accordance with a request of the Commission at its thirty-sixth session. It contains a description of activities undertaken in response to the actions of the Commission at its thirty-sixth session with regard to the implementation of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme and a discussion of the revision of international standards for conducting censuses. The final draft of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2*, is before the Commission as a background document for consideration and adoption.

The Commission may wish to discuss the points for action contained in paragraph 18 of the present report.

* E/CN.3/2007/1.

06-65170 (E) 030107

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I. Introduction

1. The Statistical Commission has before it the report of the Secretary-General summarizing the activities of the United Nations Statistics Division in collaboration with the regional commissions, undertaken in response to the decisions taken by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-sixth session[1] in the area of demographic and social statistics. In the process of implementing the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, the Commission requested that the United Nations Statistics Division act as the umbrella organization for setting standards, providing technical expertise and training and setting priorities, as needed. In addition, the Commission requested that the umbrella strategy evolve around regional arrangements to the fullest extent possible. The Commission also requested that the Division proceed with its work on the revision and update of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*.[2]

II. Activities of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme

2. The 2010 World Programme, as endorsed by the Commission at its thirty-sixth session and adopted by Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/13 of 22 July 2005, had three main goals:

Goal 1

To support activities aimed at ensuring that Member States conduct a population and housing census at least once during the period 2005-2014;

Goal 2

To produce a revised and updated version of the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, through the expert group;

Goal 3

To encourage Member States to carry out a population and housing census and to disseminate census results as an essential source of information for small area, national, regional and international planning and development.

3. The Division, as secretariat to the Commission and in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, organized regional and global expert group meetings and workshops; provided technical guidance; and spearheaded the revision and updating of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*. The revisions took cognizance of regional arrangements and flexible frameworks for developing regionally comparable statistics. For example, in June 2006, the Conference of European Statisticians adopted new recommendations for the 2010 regional population and housing censuses.

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2005, Supplement No. 4* (E/2005/24), chap. IV, para. 12.

[2] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.8.

4. The Division is working closely with other international agencies, such as the World Bank and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). As a follow-up to the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics,[3] which identified the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme as one of the key areas of action for enhancing sustainable improvements in national and international statistical capacity, the World Bank has provided financial support for the planning and implementation of the World Programme. Collaboration with UNFPA focused on advocacy activities and the provision of technical assistance in census-taking through its country support teams.

5. The United Nations Statistics Division continued the work, as requested by the Statistical Commission, to maintain the 2010 World Programme website and complement it with additional features, such as descriptions of alternative census designs.[4] In addition, the Division conducted two census implementation workshops in Africa.

III. Review and update of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*

6. The main aim of the present report is to submit the second revised *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, for adoption by the Commission. In the revision of the recommendations the broadest possible participation was ensured through the work of the expert group on the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, which established a drafting group, three working groups and several technical sub-groups, as follows:

(a) Drafting group (chaired by Canada): the group reviewed all submissions by the working groups and prepared the final draft of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2*;

(b) Working group on standards, frameworks and a core set of outputs (chaired by Australia): the group reviewed topics such as marital status, households, families and living arrangements; employment; education; mortality; human functioning and disability; internal and international migration statistics; housing; and coordination of a core set of census tabulations for international dissemination. The following technical sub-groups were established by the group:

(i) Technical sub-group on internal and international migration statistics;

(ii) Technical sub-groups on human functioning and disability;

(iii) Technical sub-group on a core set of outputs and tabulations for international dissemination;

(iv) Technical sub-group on housing census topics;

(c) Working group on census planning and management (chaired by Japan): the group paid particular attention to alternative census designs; strategies for integrated data collection and dissemination; quality assurance; outsourcing; and

[3] Available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc04/marrakech.pdf.

[4] Available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/alternativeCensusDesigns.htm.

information technology in censuses. The working group had two technical sub-groups, namely:

(i) Technical sub-group on integrated data collection and dissemination;

(ii) Technical sub-group on alternative designs;

(d) Working group on the promotion of censuses: making value visible (chaired by the Philippines): this group focused on the dissemination of census results.

7. To facilitate regular and cost-effective communication, an interactive web-based discussion forum was developed by the United Nations Statistics Division for the members of working groups and technical sub-groups (see http://unstats.un.org/unsd/globalcensusforum/), which was complemented by numerous e-mail exchanges.

8. In addition, the Division organized three expert group meetings in August 2005, June 2006 (specifically on housing censuses) and July 2006. All three expert group meetings were held in New York.[5] Following the suggestions and recommendations made at those meetings the draft of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2* was finalized for consideration by the Statistical Commission. The reviewed and updated draft publication has been circulated as a background document and is available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/default.aspx, and will also be uploaded on the Commission website at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2007.htm.

9. The revised *Principles and Recommendations* incorporate several important changes, such as: (a) a revised definition of place of usual residence, (b) a discussion of alternative approaches to conducting a census, (c) a presentation of recommended tabulations, (d) an emphasis on the importance of metadata, (e) a reordering and updating of core topics and (f) a description of a revised classification of housing units. Some of these changes are briefly discussed below.

10. The definition of place of usual residence has been revised to include a time dimension. The draft devotes a section on alternative approaches to population and housing censuses while pointing out that for some of these approaches there is still limited operational experience because they have not yet completed the full cycle required to produce small-area statistics. To facilitate the exchange of information on alternative census approaches, as it becomes available, the United Nations Statistics Division will continue to maintain and update a website detailing various approaches, including country experiences of such different approaches,[6] throughout the 2010 census round.

11. The draft calls for the dissemination of census data in different formats and levels of sophistication to reach different users. The draft underscores the importance of collecting census data suitable for cross-national comparisons. To achieve this, the document introduces 51 recommended tabulations that all national statistical/census authorities would be requested to generate at the lowest geographical level at least once during the 2010 census round.

[5] The reports of the expert group meetings are available as background documents.

[6] Available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/alternativeCensusDesigns.htm.

12. The collection and presentation of metadata is highlighted in the text. The draft stresses their importance and the need to consider them as indispensable elements that can facilitate the accurate interpretation of census results. All the recommended tabulations are accompanied by a request for metadata.

13. In addition to the above-mentioned changes, the second revised *Principles and Recommendations* presents geo-coding in more detail than was previously the case. Within the framework of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, the United Nations Statistics Division will update the current handbook on the subject.[7] The document emphasizes the role of quality assurance in managing censuses, which is explained in more detail in the corresponding handbook.[8]

14. The draft publication proposes a number of changes in the ranking of topics to be covered in population and housing censuses. The following topics that were designated as core in the previous revisions are now designated as additional: time worked for economic activity; useful floor space; rental and owner-occupied housing costs; and year or period of construction of the building. New core topics include country of birth (in conjunction with place of birth); year or period of arrival at the current address; date of birth of last child born alive; household deaths in the past 12 months; disability status; main source of drinking water; type of toilet; sewage disposal; fuel used for cooking; and the availability of information and communication technology devices.

15. Housing is extensively covered. A new classification of housing units that amplifies the differences between conventional dwellings and other housing units is introduced. It also presents a more detailed description of institutions as collective living quarters.

IV. Anticipated future activities

16. Following the completion of the review and update of the first revised *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, the United Nations Statistics Division will embark on a number of activities as part of the implementation of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme. An integral part of the Programme is the provision of technically sound advice, to countries and areas, that builds upon the existing strengths of national statistical/census offices while considering ways to strengthen overall national statistical capacity in the process of conducting censuses and related national sample surveys. The Programme will also encourage the sharing and exchange of national experiences through international, regional and subregional exchange programmes, workshops and advisory services.

17. A range of activities are planned to support the implementation of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, among them:

[7] *Handbook on Geographic Information Systems and Digital Mapping* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.XVII.12).

[8] *Handbook on Census Management for Population and Housing Censuses* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.XVII.15, Rev.1).

(a) Conducting and supporting regional and subregional workshops on critical areas of census-taking and implementation. One such area is the use of information technology in censuses;

(b) In the area of advisory services the main goal will be to identify common solutions to technical and organizational problems that many countries confront in planning and conducting censuses;

(c) In order to assist countries to successfully and efficiently conduct censuses the Statistics Division will update existing and produce additional census handbooks, to complement the *Principles and Recommendations*;

(d) Recognizing that many international, regional and subnational organizations are stakeholders in the 2010 World Programme, the Statistics Division will continue to develop the communications networks needed to support the Programme. In addition, the Division will further develop a mechanism to monitor countries' ability to provide funding for the census and to make this information available to prospective donors;

(e) The Division will continue to document the experiences of countries related to the 2010 World Programme by collecting materials used by countries and entering them into a database. The information will be made available on the Division's censuses website at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/default.aspx.

V. Points for action by the Commission

18. **The Commission is requested to:**

(a) **Review and endorse the second revised *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*;**

(b) **Provide guidance for further implementation of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, taking cognizance of the contents of paragraph 17.**